"WHAT MAKES A GOOD PERSONALITY"

The sermon this morning is, in many ways, an analysis, from a different perspective, of what I have been saying to you, repeatedly, since last September. It is, at the same time, a means of a general introduction to the type of thing that I want to do in my series of sermons with you, insofar as it relates religion to the basic nature of man and the universe, not in any poetic, romantic fashion, but in a deep, physiological way.

Personality is one of those things that has most of us confused, and you may end up being more confused after this morning than you were to begin with. It is something that we have all been talking about and worrying about. The very fact of our worrying and the nature of it indicates our lack of understanding of its basic nature. During these last few years, there have been all kinds of books written on personality; how to be popular; how to influence other people; how to be gay and charming; and so on down the line. The thing is that they have been sold, and they have sold amazingly well. It does not seem possible that any other people could have been more generally interested in personality than we are. It is true that our interest is on a superficial level, but that is just another of the many signs of the decadence of our day.

Personality has become something existing in a mysterious, inner, psychic world. It has been pictured in an inherent force that you either have or do not have, and if you do not have it you learn to pretend that you do. It has become something down in the subconscious that was formulated long before you were conscious, so there is nothing you can do about it except learn how to keep it hidden, or adjust to it as best you can.

Notice the modern emphasis on graphology, palmistry, phrenology, astrology, numerology, the subconscious of Freudian psychology, anything that will take the problem out of our scope, anything that will remove the responsibility from us as self-conscious thinking individuals. So if you can prove that it depends on the lines of your hand or the bumps of your head or the formulation of the stars under which you were born, you are relieved of the responsibility. After this all you need do is adjust to the rules that these quacks lay down. If you do things under certain signs, events will probably react favorably, and on certain days you are the witty, charming person that all friends love.

It is a shocking thing, but it ought to be observed, because it is indicative of our American, or our modern cultural attitude, in that we are constantly refusing to dig deep into the nature of things or to recognize and face facts. We are always trying to avoid the issue, trying to avoid personal responsibility by placing our problems on a superficial level that relieves us of the necessity of effect.

If personality is not this sort of thing, then what is it? I am going to give you a definition of it. First of all, there are two ways of regarding personality. There is the objective way. This approach,personality consists of all those ways in which he is formed, his clothes, appearance, his beauty or his ugliness, his muscles, the way in which he moves, and all of those outward aspects that you can see in another body. Those things make that body a personality in an objective sense.

Contrary to the popular usage of the term, personality is best described in a subjective way, and this is the heart of the matter. Personality consists not only of all our physical appearances but much more important, all those ways we have of expressing ourselves and communicating with others. I am saying that personality is the individual in community. Personality is the individual generalized, and

personality only appears where you have a possibility of using a generalized concept. By a general concept, I mean an idea that has the same meaning for me as it has for you, so that when I use this word, you know what I mean. That is language and where there is no language there is no personality. Wherever there is communication between individuals by means of a language on its various levels, from sign language up to the symbolic conceptual level of our language, you have personality in lesser to higher forms.

Does that sound complicated? It is really very simple. Take a dog that has personality. He has objective personality, as does most any creature; but that dog only has real personality, you know, insofar as it has a way of speaking to you, of making itself felt. You say he almost talks, for when you speak to him, he acts, and performs your commands. When he wants something, he indicates it to you; and the longer you live with a dog, the more intimate this communication becomes. That is when you say a dog has personality. It resides in that language, in that communication.

An individual's personality is a high one or a well-developed one, according to the amount of communication he has with other people. The best personality is considered the one who has the most contacts with people, the most number of occasions in which he harmonizes with his fellowmen. He is the one who moves most easily in his social circle, the leader of his group, the one who can adjust himself most readily to others. You see, it is all based on the communication level or the use of symbols. And this is the way in which these modern popular writers have approached the problem. Instead of seeking to understand the basic nature of communication, they have dealt only with the superficial or popular expressions of it. Thus, the more friends you have, the more fluently you can talk, the more poise and charm and social grace you have, the better is your personality.

I am going to suggest that you cannot really consider personality apart from character. You may wonder what some of these sections have to do with each other this morning, but I think you will find when it is over that they do hang together. At least I hope so. What is character as apart from personality? Character, too, may be regarded in an objective and a subjective way. Character, <u>objectively</u>, is the way in which that personality organizes himself about the prevalent moral codes of the group to which he belongs. Now, mind you, I have said it consists of adjustment to the morality of the group to which he belongs. That is character in an objective way. <u>Subjectively</u>, character is the way in which an individual moulds himself and fashions his life around ends which he, himself, holds most important or worthy. Thus, you see, there is the great contrast sometimes between what Society thinks is a good character, and what some few other people think is a good character. Just consider the controversy concerning our President.

You know that you regard some few people very, very highly whereas, those same persons are, more or less, scorned by the social groups in which they live. But you see something there, that Society reckons not with. In other words, if particular standards differ from those of the social and moral code, Society frowns on them, whereas, those who hold them may be very good characters.

Now one more caution: Character, as such, is neither good nor bad. Character is strong or weak, and then good or bad. A very strong character may be a very wicked person. It depends on the quality of the things about which you are organized. I think, for instance, that Al Capone was a very strong character, from what we, as the general public, know of him, a very strong character, because he was closely integrated, extremely closely integrated about the ends which he considered worthy. Society frowned on him because his ends were judged unworthy.

Closeness of integration or strength of character is not necessarily good.

You must know that Jesus was put to death because he was closely integrated about an end which to him was at most worthful, but which the general society of his day regarded as destructive and unworthy. You have to know a person very well, indeed, to stand in judgment on his or her character.

It would appear as though personality then were to be judged on the basis of the communication, and the meaning of that communication, between individuals, without reference to the fact that a man's character is the extent or depth of his organization around an ideal. So, you see, a very glittering personality may be a very diffuse character, a very weak character, insofar as there is no one thing about which he is organized. As a matter of interest, if not fact, it seems that a diffuse or weak character is almost a result of the type of contact necessary to gain what is popularly known as an attractive personality. Of course there is no necessary relation between them.

Now I am going on to another division in this sermon, and this is really the heart of it. I hesitated a long time as to whether to call this sermon "What Makes A Good Personality," or "The Chemistry of The Soul," or "A Sermon In Chemistry," because the idea back of this originated from a paper written by a distinguished chemist which I had occasion to read some months back. In this paper, the chemist was talking about what makes things tick. He was speaking from his field, but he was saying things from a chemical standpoint that I am trying to say from a religious standpoint. I think that his illustrations and his lessons will be interesting, if not helpful to us, as we strive to gain a deeper understanding of ourselves, remembering what I said at the beginning, that we, as individuals, are rooted deep in the nature of things, and if we are to understand ourselves spiritually, we must understand the nature of things.

The chemist was talking about objects. There are three different types of objects. The first he calls hard objects. These hard objects, hard and brittle, are hard and brittle because of the way in which they are put together. If there are any professional scientists in the congregation, they will know what I am trying to say, and I trust they will excuse any simplification that was necessary for my understanding and for me to be able to tell you. Hard objects are hard because of their molecular structure. You know that atoms are the essential elements, that atoms are broken up into electrons and protons and so on; but atoms, themselves, combine to form larger systems called molecules, and these molecules, in turn, form larger systems, and they become cells. One object is distinguished from another, or differs from another, by virtue of the way in which the elements in it are combined, differs because of the molecular structure.

In a hard and brittle object, the cells are packed in layers and the cells, these larger unit cells as they are called, have eight different points on them; and evidently, they are attached to all the other unit cells at each of those eight points. Then the individual cells which, apparently, have three points, are attached at all three points themselves. So they are connected by layers, and they are packed tight and hard, in contact and union at every possible point. There is no space between the layers.

A tough object differs from the hard object insofar as there is space between the layers, and these individual cells with three points are united with other individual cells at something less than the three points, either at one or at two, but not at all three. So there is a more elastic nature there. They have a chance of flowing and moulding themselves, whereas, in the hard object they are compact and tight.

The third type is the soft type. You could use the illustration, as this man did, of cotton. A soft object, such as cotton, is one that receives every impression from everything that meets it. It moulds itself easily to forms. It can be compressed and shifted around in any w ay that you want. A soft object is malleable and plastic and rubbery, if you will, or cottony.

I have added to these three different categories a fourth one which is not, itself, a structural matter, but is a matter of quality: Smoothness. A hard, brittle or a tough or a soft object may be a smooth or a rough object, and it is smooth or rough according to your treatment of its surface. So, if you take some polish and a cloth, and rub it over the surface as you do furniture, you make it a shining object. You so arrange the structure of the top of that object, whether it is hard or soft, so that anything that hits it, slides off. The molecular structure is the same in the body of the object, but now it reflects things, reflects the sunlight better than it otherwise would. It reflects other objects that bump against it because there is no traction. It is like a rubber tire on ice. Smoothness is a quality that any object may have.

Those are the four different types of personality that I want to consider just very briefly. The connection here is more than merely illustrative. I want you to remember that the human being is also a physical object and that he is subject to the same basic structural features as other objects, because, you see, we too, are a part of the natural world. We are made up of the same material. We are just a particular form.

You know hard people, hard and brittle. Tungsten, carbide, glass and diamond are hard; and these hard things are powerful things. They make impressions upon other objects. A diamond will scratch almost any surface. In similar fashion, a hard person is one who usually makes a name for himself in life. He is the kind of person that runs our great business and industrial enterprises. He is for the most part, a raving success, whether it be in the movie industry, in business, in teaching or, I am sorry to say, even in preaching. A hard person is one who has so organized himself that he is a compact, hard-fighting mass of material. He is a hammer, and other persons and things are crushed by him on the anvil of life. He is so busy impressing himself on things and people that he seldom receives any impressions. As so often happens, while that person is not influenced so that he bends and gives with the pressures upon him, he does not see the glance in the eye of another person that says: "See, here I am. Can you do anything for me?" Or, "See, I would like to know you better." He is the kind that does not realize that he has his hand on the shoulder in front of him, and that coming behind him is another man with his hand on his shoulder, and he is only one of a great chain of life. No, for him life is something to be acted on by his strong self. I am not sure how much personality he or she has, but I think, intrinsically, very little.

Such persons do not always come to grief, but if they do not go through life triumphant in their own way, missing all the glory that lies around them, when some force hits them that is stronger than they are, they crack. Hard, brittle objects split. They do not give little by little and so absorb the blow. They break wide open. Now is all depends, as I said, whether a force sufficiently strong hits them sufficiently hard. You know people who have broken in that way. You must remember some from the depression days. They were the height of success; impossible to touch them with all their power and their strength; and then something hit them that was stronger than their physical power, purely physical level now, and they broke. There is nothing much more pathetic in this life than that kind of broken person.

Others of them are broken by something happening to someone that has managed to infiltrate into their hardness and to achieve the position of love in their life. When something happens to them, they break. Here is a gentle force of love, but it is a strong one, and it has broken many a hard person.

I wonder if we could say that this is what happened to Paul when he met the love of Jesus in the early Christian Disciples? I think, too, that Judas was such a person. These illustrations may not be apt but that is beside the point. You can call to mind many of your own. Judas was a hard personality. He knew what he wanted and he was organized around that purpose. He wanted the Kingdom brought in, and Jesus was going to be the leader Who would bring in that Kingdom by force; and so he arranged things to have that happen. When the thing he wanted to happen did not happen, he was a failure, and he broke and hanged himself as so many do. You see, there was no "give" in Judas. He was connected at all three points as an individual cell; and when the blow came, he couldn't roll with it. He split. The all important difference between Paul and Judas is that when the crisis came to Paul, he was able to reform himself and thus make it a tremendous triumph. He is a wonderful example of "How To Meet a Crisis."

Now, take a soft person, to go to the other extreme. He is soft because he has no character. He may have a charming personality, but really, as the theme develops, it would seem as though we ought to stop worrying and thinking about personality. It is something that should accompany character for it is no good without it, and character is something that can be worked on intelligently. Cotton is soft because the threads have no one direction to them, but when you take a soft thing like cotton and put it under heavy pressure, you can get a very tough object, or when you take the threads of a bale of cotton and line them up and give them direction, you have a very tough object. So, when you take a soft person and bring him under heavy pressure, as in time of war, you sometimes develop tremendous toughness, and that is what has taken place with so many of our American boys.

We were considered soft by these German people, and I have heard them make that assertion from time to time, lecturing in their classes at the universities. We were soft and decadent, and they were right. Do not let this crisis fool you on that. They were largely right, but when the pressure of the circumstance came, and when there came into our lives a mission, a mission to save Freedom and Democracy or our Country, we fused. The threads were given direction, and we became a tough people, hard to break and hard to cut and hard to destroy.

So you see the need in our life of something that will fuse us, and this is going to continue to be a pressing need when this temporary crisis of the world is over. It is our great social problem, and it is one that this Church will be working on. We will be out to bring those lives back into this normal social routine, and still give them something that will line up the threads of their lives, giving them direction, organizing them about some one end, giving them, you see--no, not <u>giving</u>; <u>helping</u> them to develop or maintain strong and good characters. Beautiful personalities will accompany this development. I wonder if Peter, of the Disciples, was not an example of a soft personality, fused into a strong and valuable character.

I will treat these "smooth people" now. This is one of the qualities that has characterized us. I suppose, in spite of our roughness, apparent roughness, we are one of the smoothest people. And yet, one would scarcely say the smoothest because some of those European people, for instance, the Italians, have become so shiny with the long history they have gone through that now they reflect everything. So it is with us. We are smooth. We have tried to be smooth. It is a term that

we have developed in slang to express a good personality. He is a "smooth person". He is one who isn't easily disturbed. He is one who is not thrown off the track. He is one who "knows his way around," and he knows people, and he is "wise" to things. The more brilliantly smooth and glittering you are, the better you are thought to be. But you see what is happening to that kind of personality? Everything that has a possibility of good in it glances off because the surface is too smooth. It is glassy. When you see some cynical, adult, mature--no, I will take mature away--some cynical, adult people, and you know they have seen everything and done everything and know everything, you know that nothing can get through to them.

As I have said before, there is no more difficult person to preach to than an habitual church-goer. You know I told the committee that brought me here that I wanted to form a new church. Now that is no reflection on the people who were here before I came. They are a surprisingly good group (I had better say that). But a person whose church-going is merely a habit--and the Catholic Church works on that basis--cannot be reached. He has heard it all, you see. He knows it all, and he is not sitting there to see what this other person, whether he knows more or less, may be able to bring him from a slightly different angle or approach or experience. You might just as well be talking to those beautiful windows. That is true of all of us, in more or less degree. We are too smooth. We are too sophistocated. We are too brilliant, and we are too glittery.

Now this tough personality. The tough personality is the religious personality. I am using these terms in a general way, and yet those of you who know our great American philosopher, William James, will remember that he characterized people as tender-minded or tough-minded. The tough-minded people were those who were interested in facing facts. Tough-minded people are people who are not afraid to look at things that they do not agree with and do not like. Tough-minded people are those who can "take it" and not be broken because they are resilient and elastic enough. Because the direction in which their threads are going are sure enough in their minds, they are not upset at their possible deflection. They know that sooner or later they will bring them around in the proper direction again. What is more, they do not break with the impact of things bigger or stronger than themselves. We had better be developing some tough personalities these days, because we are faced on every hand with things that are bigger and stronger than we are, and we will crack if we do not find the right way in which to meet them.

A tough personality is one who is joined to anyone else or to anything by less than the three points that represent him. This is illustrative, remember, but still physically true. He is tied at only one or two points, but he is still tied so that when a heavy blow comes, he can roll with the punch. He is a football player who does not break when he is hit. He may be thrown for a loss, and he may be bent double with pain, but he is not broken, and he gets up to resume his playing and his direction again.

That is what we need. We need people who have got that integration of themselves around the one important worthy cause in life so that they are strong characters, and everything they have is directed that way; but they do not hold on to any one thing in life with all that they have got, because if they do, they will break when that one thing is taken away from them. So they go through life clinging tentatively, tentatively to anything and all things, but knowing in their hearts the direction they are going to take and their threads are organized that way.

They are the kind of people--now to pursue our chemical analysis--who may be unbalanced. The chemist to whom I referred earlier had this interesting thesis, and it is a wonderful idea. In order to change the nature of anything in chemistry, you have first to unbalance the system, and then you direct the unbalanced system in the channel you want it to go. In the process of electroplating you unbalance the solution in which your current is flowing, and then you make the positive charges go to the negative pole. You change its molecular structure in order to achieve the thing you want. A simpler illustration: you boil salt water and you get salt. Apply heat and pressure and you get a new object, but in order to get that, you had to unbalance the water. Gasoline is made by cracking oil. You apply heat, and you change the molecular structure from a rough, large structure to a finer one. In brief, simple form, you unbalance the oil, and you get this precious one hundred octane gasoline. So, with people, the same thing.

Now you see again the importance of a crisis. You take the personality that is organized about some one end, and that end, no matter on how high a level it may be, is not as high as it could be. So you disorganize the molecular structure of the individual. In this case, you present him with a crisis. Under great pressure or under great danger, he breaks up. He does not crack, but he disintegrates a little. He becomes disorganized, as we said, and now he is in a position to be directed in the line you want him to go. Through this disorganization he is presented with the opportunity of reorganizing himself on a higher level. From being crude oil, he may become one hundred octane gasoline. From being a personality organized about an inferior end he may become one organized about the supremely worthful. From being a person organized around the end of success, by having his money taken away from him, he may then become a person organized around friendship. By depriving him of his friends and thus throwing him into disorganization, he may become a person organized around the nature of God. The more dislocation we have, the more possibility of greater and greater good coming. The more we can understand the nature of God, the less closely we will cling to any one thing in our life. We will be free to roll with the pressures, but we will never lose our direction, because that is the thing about which our personalities are organized. God is our direction and our guide.

Do you remember that old and well-known statement: "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless 'till they find rest in Thee."